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THE STORY OF PAINTING
FROM THE RENAISSANCE TO THE PRESENT

*h.f.***ullmann**

Painters discover reality

RENAISSANCE AND MANNERISM

1420-1600

PREDECESSORS OF THE RENAISSANCE 1300-1420

14th-century predecessors

Like all the arts, painting had been treated as a craft since classical times. Painters were commissioned by high-ranking people or institutions to produce paintings on a particular subject, for a particular purpose, within a given time. Painters only began to win the creative freedom to give paintings a purpose of their own – a content beyond the motif itself – 700 years ago.

At that time, around the turn of the 14th century, they passed beyond medieval pictorial forms and developed a method of perspectival reproduction that shapes our own ways of seeing paintings even today. Art's area of responsibility, formerly restricted to the depiction of sacred subjects, cautiously expanded in line with a growing interest in the real world, and new areas of subject matter were granted access into art. As part of a lengthy process, painters began to escape the craftsman class, and to express their ideas as liberal artists.

This apparently new vision of things emerged out of many different changes in all spheres of life, which had helped to transform intellectual attitudes and ways of seeing the world. Far-reaching trade relations with a lively exchange of goods had brought the

cities, particularly in northern Italy, wealth, affluence and growth. The confidence of the new bourgeoisie now forming in the cities burgeoned along with their economic prosperity. The connection with far-off cities as well as the exchange of unfamiliar goods and information extended the horizon. The world, which was still described as a disc, became – as did this very notion – a challenge to be explored.

People stopped relying exclusively on religion, and the knowledge controlled by the clerics. They began asking questions, and wanted to examine everything. Bold seafarers set off to explore the blank areas of the map, and to find treasures in unknown countries to add to the affluence and wealth at home. To do this, they needed a worldly science and technology. Many inventions of this period, such as clocks, maps and a whole series of mechanical apparatus, are evidence of this need. As people grew interested in the world around them, painting also turned towards a hitherto unknown realism. This new vision was first apparent in the paintings of the Italian Giotto di Bondone.

Taken from real life

When Giotto painted the fresco *The Mourning of Christ* in 1304, painters were still simple craftspeople. They did not have the notion of the 'artist' that we have today. Their



In the Renaissance the world is investigated and defined with man at its centre: *Draughtsman Drawing a Recumbent Woman*, from 'The Teaching of Measurements'. Woodcut by Albrecht Dürer, c 1527.

1302: Pope Boniface VIII issues the Bull 'Unam Sanctam', according to which 'every human creature' is to be subject to the Pope for the sake of their souls, and secular princes must bear arms on the orders of the Church.

1309: The struggle for secular and ecclesiastical power reaches

a climax. The Papal residence is moved to Avignon (until 1376).

1318: Development of a new system of payment: a law is passed in Venice authorizing money transfers (Giro bank).

1321: Dante Alighieri completes his major work, the *Divine Comedy*.

1400: First excavations of ancient Rome by Filippo Brunelleschi.

1421: Giovanni de' Medici is elected head of Florence, and thus stands at the beginning of the Medici dynasty.

1434: Cosimo de' Medici founds the Platonic Academy in Florence.

1452: Leon Battista Alberti publishes his standard art-theoretical book *On Architecture*.

1492: Christopher Columbus discovers America.

1546: Work begins on the Louvre in Paris. Foundation of the first stock market in France.

1550: Giorgio Vasari begins his *Lives of the Most Famous Italian Architects, Painters and Sculptors* – the first art-history book.

1588: The Spanish Armada is destroyed by the English fleet. End of Spanish domination of the sea.

1590: The dome of St Peter's in Rome is completed from plans by Michelangelo. William Shakespeare writes his first plays.

Master of science

LEONARDO DA VINCI

1452-1519

Leonardo da Vinci is the prototype of the creative Renaissance man, the 'uomo universale'. Not only was he a brilliant innovator in painting, he was also well versed in all areas of the (then) natural sciences, technology and architecture. His contemporaries admired Leonardo's universal talents, and his inexhaustible urge for knowledge and research. In an inspired way, he combined a sober and objective observation of nature with a passion for the artistic penetration of invisible reality. His painting influenced the work of many artists over the centuries.

Leonardo was born in 1452 in the little Upper Italian village of Vinci. Little is known about his youth. From 1469 he lived in Florence, where he worked for five years from 1471 as an assistant in the workshop of the painter Verrocchio.

His early works include several depictions of Mary, one outstanding example of which is the *Annunciation*. In this panel painting,



Annunciation, c 1427. Oil on wood, 98 x 217 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

begun in 1471, Leonardo's particular painterly means of expression are clearly apparent. The events occur in front of Mary's house in the mild evening twilight. The garden appears soft with damp grass and flowers, and is surrounded by a wall. In the centre of the upper part of the painting the forest opens up, providing a clear view of a deep landscape with trees and hills. The Archangel Gabriel, dressed in red, bends his right knee to tell Mary the message of the Lord. The Virgin Mary openly and fearlessly returns the angel's greeting. Her right arm rests on her sewing.

With her flowing hair and soft features, Mary embodies Leonardo's mild feminine ideal of beauty. A representation of precise draughtsmanship, along with the subtle shading of the colours of the soft, tender physiognomies, are typical features of the portraits of this period of work; they reveal the attempt to give expression to the internal, the soul, through the external.

Leonardo develops sfumato

In 1482 Leonardo went to Milan, to the court of Ludovico Sforza. He worked for him initially as a court portrait-painter, but soon, because of his comprehensive knowledge, also as an engineer, designing his new water pipes, as an inventor and builder of war-machines and defences, and as an artistic designer of opulent court festivals and theat-

rical productions. During his Milan years, Leonardo was also commissioned to paint numerous religious and biblical themes. During this period he brought the characteristic painting technique called *sfumato* (It., 'smoky') to perfection. He achieved this sfumato effect by means of soft transitions of light and shade; things lose their rigidity, and reality appears hazy, which sparks all kinds of emotions in the viewer.

The softening of all sharp contours and clear delineations creates the mood of a freer painterly representation, in which the paint seems to adapt itself to the qualities of places and things – day and night, lightness and darkness become important components of the painting. Leonardo thus proved himself to be a master, and at the same time to have gone beyond earlier Florentine painting – in so far as he had taken up its legacy, but he takes their orientation towards drawing as a strictly linear, abstractly geometrical means of expression and replaces it



Self Portrait (attribution uncertain), 1515 c. Red chalk drawing, 33,2 x 21.2 cm. Biblioteca Reale, Turin

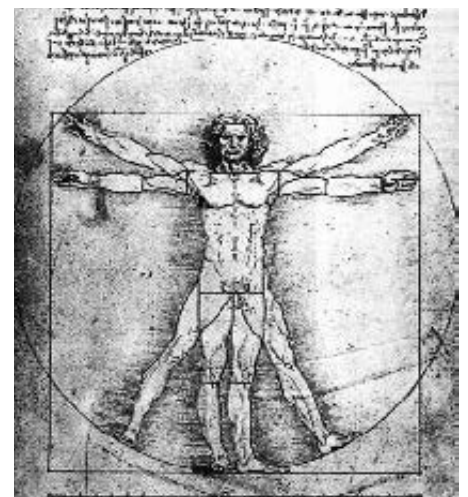
with the rich and fluent interplay of light and shade, revealing bodies in all their vividness, and giving them intellectual and spiritual depth. The basis of this innovation is Leonardo's positive concept of shadow. It no longer means simply the absence of light and colour, but becomes a colour value in its own right, an atmosphere to be interpreted and represented.

Constructed reality – *The Last Supper*

It was not only the effects of colour and light that Leonardo investigated and used in new ways. Like many of his contemporaries, he studied the reproduction of spatial reality through perspectival representation on the picture surface. But with references to the content of the painting, and to relations within it, he brought this 'realistic' depiction of the world to a new level of pictorial reality. This desire to be 'master of the beauty of nature' – to perceive, recreate and go beyond it – is particularly apparent in his fresco *The Last Supper*.

This painting, which the monks commissioned him to paint as a mural for the refectory in the monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan between 1495 and 1498, shows a comprehensive structure of compositional relationships. The table stretches along the lower edge of the painting, turned frontally towards the viewer, so that the viewer stands directly facing Christ and the disciples. Christ is sitting at the centre, and has just spoken these words: 'One of you will betray me!' The disciples deny this accusation with excited gestures, and fall to discussing one another. Their horror and astonishment spreads like a wave from the centre of the picture to both edges, and is thrown back again. The figure of Jesus Christ in the centre of the painting, on the other hand, has a peaceful equilibrium and a dignified strength. Above the centre window there is a

Proportion of the Human Figure, 1492 c. Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice



The brilliant creator of weighty lightness

MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI

1475-1564

Many people saw Michelangelo as the apotheosis of the Renaissance, embodying in his life and his work the greatness and tragedy of the age like no other. His art in the fields of painting, sculpture and architecture forms a single corpus of work, at the centre of which is the creative human figure, with all its power and suffering. For Michelangelo, artistic creation is a means through which man comes to understand himself and the world, and it becomes for him a kind of universal religion.

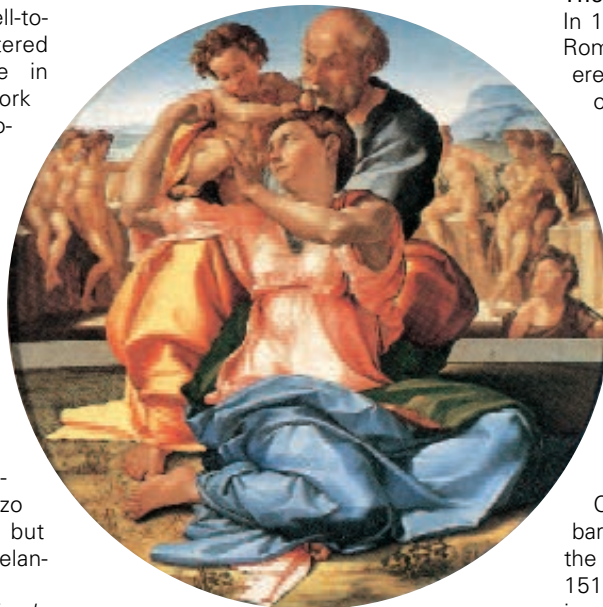
Michelangelo Buonarroti, born to a well-to-do family in Caprese near Arezzo, entered Ghirlandaio's workshop in Florence in 1488. Soon afterwards he went to work for Bertoldo di Giovanni, who introduced him to the Medici circles. In 1490 Lorenzo il Magnifico introduced him to the grandeurs of the neo-Platonic academy, whose humanist ideas were to be important for his work. After the fall of the Medici in 1494 he went first to Bologna, briefly returned to Florence a year later, and went to Rome for the first time in 1496. Returning to Florence in 1501 he engaged himself in the work of his artistic opposite number, Leonardo da Vinci. The frescoes by the two artists in the Palazzo Vecchio have not been preserved, but another work does tell us about Michelangelo's painting style at this point.

The Holy Family, also known as *Tondo Doni*, was painted around 1503-4. The central figure, Mary, crouching cross-legged on the grass in the foreground, turns with a wide twist of her torso, deliberately exaggerated by the artist (called 'linea serpentinata') towards Joseph, who is standing behind her and passing her the muscular Christ-child. Behind a wall, on the right, we can see John the Baptist, still a child.

Their spatial separation indicates that their paths will diverge. John will go into the world and announce the coming of the Lord, while Christ has already begun his journey into inner loneliness and his future Passion. All the figures look serious and solemn. The clear



David, 1501-04. Marble, height 550 cm. Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence



The Holy Family (Tondo Doni), c 1503.

Tempera on wood, diameter 120 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

separation of the main group from the background, the brightly-coloured landscape and the plasticity of the scene might be seen as a deliberate contrast to the subtle 'veiling' sfumato technique of Leonardo.

Michelangelo as a sculptor

Michelangelo thought that it was in sculpture that he would most successfully be able to realize his idea of man as the centre of divine creation. The naked male figure, the Titan, was the perfect translation of this idea. As an educational ideal, a moral power, this was entirely in the classical tradition, but Michelangelo had a different idea of sculpture. For Michelangelo the body was primarily mass and volume, which had to be wrought from the resistant material of stone, bound to the gravity of the earth – a vision that the artist also carried over into painting.

In the Florentine years between 1501 and 1504 he carved the famous statue of David, originally planned as a niche-figure for the cathedral, but then erected in front of the Palazzo Vecchio. In its conflict between minute detail and large form, the figure radiates a heroic but controlled pathos. The lower half of the body bears the massive burden of the powerful torso. All the weight rests on the outstretched right leg

(defined as the 'standing leg' by classical antiquity, as opposed to the relaxed 'free leg') while the rest of the body is tensed as if for a show of strength. His hands are heavy and large, this impression reinforced by the left hand curving towards the shoulder. All the figure's attention and energy are concentrated in the head, and focused at the bridge of the nose, between the eyebrows. In his unity of strength and anger, David was seen by contemporaries as a guardian of freedom and independence, as a political allegory of the city-republic of Florence and its virtues of citizenship.

The Sistine Chapel

In 1505 Pope Julius II brought the artist to Rome, where he first commissioned him to erect his funeral monument in the Church of S. Pietro in Vincoli. Pope Julius was a warlord, who, sword in hand, personally subjugated a number of cities and incorporated them within the Vatican state. He was also a patron of the arts who gathered around him the most important artists of his time, and tried to bind them to his will. Such was his temper that he even struck Michelangelo with his stick while he was working.

In 1508 the Pope commissioned Michelangelo, who would have preferred to devote himself solely to sculpture, to decorate the Sistine Chapel, which was at that time quite bare. A year later the artist began work on the main decoration, which lasted until 1512. Michelangelo undertook the painting himself.

He divided up the colossal barrel vaulting of the chapel with painted *trompe l'oeil* architecture, and chose as his main narrative theme the creation of the world and man until the fall. He represented the cycle of Genesis – nine episodes, from the separation of light and darkness to the mocking of Noah – and added single figures from other contexts: prophets, sibyls, the ances-

Madonna and Child, Red chalk drawing. Casa Buonarroti, Florence



The beautiful illusion

ROCOCO AND NEO- CLASSICISM

1715-1830

RÉGENCE AND ROCOCO 1715-1780

Elegant paintings for the drawing-room – Régence

The 18th century is the age of the Enlightenment, clearly turning its attention to this world, to pragmatism, to the feasible. With its belief in the power of reason to penetrate and explain the world in rational terms, and consequently with a critical attitude towards traditional authorities – above all the Church and the aristocracy – philosophers, committed social reformers, researchers, literati and visual artists had been preparing the ground for a development which was to reach its climax in 1789, in the French Revolution. The processes of social transformation which prepared for this historical event also left their mark in art.

When the Sun King died in 1715, his successor, Louis XV, was still a minor, so Philip, Duke of Orleans, took over the business of government (the Régence, or Regency) for seven years. His style of leadership was fundamentally different from the absolutist authority of Louis XIV. One of the regent's first official duties was to transfer the royal residence from Versailles to Paris. This move amounted to a dissolution of the old court, because the aristocracy, which had previously lived at court, now hurried to follow the ruler to the livelier capital, where there were plenty of distractions in the form of theatre, dances and private parties. In the process, the centre of power and cultural life had moved from out-of-the-way Versailles to the city; the royal court had dissolved, so to speak, into a series of private societies. As the intellectual climate and the self-image of the 'civilised' class changed – by now, along with the aristocracy, it included the mercantile bourgeoisie, bankers and tax collectors, whose bank accounts contributed considerably to the state coffers – also changed art: solemn, dramatic Baroque painting, in which the absolutist craving for power had found direct expression, retreated in favour of the elegant and intimate, the pleasant and the decorative, the atmospheric and the emotional. This early expression of Rococo was given the name of the transition government: Régence.

The representative painting of French Baroque Classicism matched neither the spirit nor the taste of a society which took its pleasure in private, without great court ceremonials, and which enjoyed a certain libertinage in its lifestyle. The new clients demanded paintings which matched the intimacy and privacy of the elegant little city castles for which they were painted. Thus the formats changed, and the pictorial repertoire and formal vocabulary were also transformed. The French painters of the Rococo no longer took their lead from the flat, heavily-outlined, rigidly classical style of Poussin. Their new guiding light was Rubens. The Flemish master's work had the *joie de vivre*, the luminescent colour and materiality, the composition focusing the action on a single point, that absolutist representational art, for all its vigorous lines, had never developed. The turn away from large-scale heroism to the pleasures of life, to a decorative intimacy, makes its first appearance in the paintings of Jean Antoine Watteau.

Mere theatre – painted role-playing

As the painter of *fêtes galantes*, or 'feasts of courtship', Watteau won a great reputation and the membership of the Académie Royale, as teacher of the new genre which he himself had invented. With his representations of the distinguished pastimes of the elegant society which, with its glittering, imaginative feasts, re-modelled the customs of the court, he had hit the nerve of the age. Watteau often found the models for his paintings at the feasts of rich friends. His paintings draw a realistic picture of the ways in which contemporary society took its pleasures, while at the same time maintaining an almost melancholy detachment from the scenes portrayed. The varied coloration and the tender, hazy style of painting lends the scenes a certain detachment, and gives them the appearance of stage-sets, not least because of their backgrounds, which often have the appearance of backdrops. Is *Gilles* really a sad clown, or just somebody playing a sad clown? A real stage-play or just dressing up, as the people of the elegant society liked to do at their intimate little parties? Deliberately, Watteau leaves the subject vague, as though to blur the boundary between theatre and distinguished role-



Jean Antoine Watteau, *Gilles*,
1718-19. Oil on canvas,
184 x 149 cm. Musée du Louvre,
Paris

The rebellious court painter

FRANCISCO GOYA

1746-1828

The Spanish painter and draughtsman Francisco José de Goya, born on 30 March 1746 in Fuendetodos (Saragossa), was one of the most contradictory and fascinating artistic figures around 1800. On the one hand, while he made his career as court painter to the Spanish royal family, and portrait-painter to the nobility and the grande bourgeoisie, he was also, particularly in his engravings, a keen critic of social abuse and a scourge of human failings.

Goya lived in an age which was influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, a time in which traditional values were being called into question, in which Spain had lost its position as the world's greatest marine power to England, in which the population was growing poorer and poorer, and in which wartime atrocities were occurring on a previously unknown scale. The resulting conflict is more fully expressed in the works of Goya than any other artist.

Goya as a political painter

In 1799, in an advertisement in Madrid's daily newspaper, Goya announced the publication of a series of engravings, with which he addressed a wide audience for the first time as a social critic.

The title of the sequence, *Caprichos* (Span. 'caprices'), at first suggested the depiction of amusing themes in the form of satire or caricature – a genre which had become increasingly well known and popular throughout Europe in the course of the 18th century, through the work of artists like Hogarth and Gillray. Goya too wanted, he explained, to un-

The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters.

(from the series *Los Caprichos*), c 1797.
Etching and aquatint, 21.6 x 15.2 cm. Private property



mask the 'extravagance, foolishness, betrayal and vice' of society, bring the individual's ignorance and stupidity to light, and thus to use the Enlightenment effect of caricature. However, he added, he had no wish to attack anyone personally. His themes were ideal, drawing on the imagination rather than nature. In this way he achieved artistic freedom for his political and highly explosive works.

The famous sheet No. 43 – *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* – was originally conceived as the title page for the whole series of the *Caprichos*. The engraving shows the sleeping or dreaming artist (in Spanish, the term 'sueno' means both sleep and dream), surrounded by bats, owls and cat-like creatures.

At first sight this claustrophobic picture seems to show a fantastic nightmare, an idea that was to return in the 20th century with the work of the Surrealists, and one to which Goya repeatedly returned well into old age – as, among other images, in the bloodthirsty painting of *Saturn Devouring one of his Children*, with its symbolic portrayal of destruction and death. But the commentary on *Sleep of Reason* refers the observer to another layer of meaning: if reason sleeps or dreams, the monsters, the terrible powers of night – ignorance, tyranny, unreason and violence – will rule.

In the *Caprichos*, Goya can be seen to represent Enlightenment ideas, with which he had come into contact through his intellectual friends in Madrid, who were in the liberal camp. In the spirit of the French Revolution they rebelled against the despotism of the monarchy, the church, the aristocracy and the judiciary, and openly spoke out against the oppression of the Spanish people, who were becoming increasingly impoverished. Goya sympathized with these ideas, they were important to him – but his post as a court painter was more important: shortly after their publication, Goya withdrew his *Caprichos* again.

This withdrawal was a characteristic act for Goya. His whole life, his whole body of artistic work underlay the conflict between the individual, rebellious desire for expression, the career-motivated conformity to traditional ***Saturn Devouring one of his Children***, 1821. Oil on plaster transferred onto canvas, 146 x 83 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid

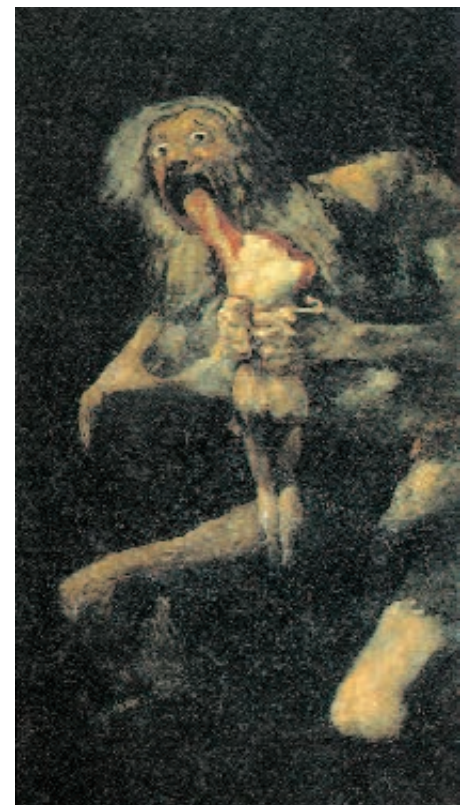


Self Portrait, 1783. Oil on canvas, 80 x 54 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Agen

conventions – and this is precisely what makes it so hard for us to understand this artist today.

Goya as court painter

The painting *The Osuna Family* represents one of Madrid's most influential aristocratic families. Francisco de Goya had a great deal to thank the Osunas for, because they had supported him since the middle of the 1780s with numerous commissions, and introduced him to aristocratic circles, which



Théodore Géricault, *the Raft of the Medusa*, 1819. Oil on canvas, 491 x 716 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris

In 1816 the fully occupied French frigate 'Medusa' ran aground near Morocco. Since there were not enough lifeboats, a raft was built which provided room for 149 people. The storm pulled it away from the boats, leaving it to drift across the sea for 27 days. Géricault did a substantial amount of preliminary studies for this painting: he interviewed survivors, made drawings of the ill or even dead, and produced horrifying sketches of the heads and limbs of executed people. Every minute detail of the picture, down to each movement of the bodies, is carefully composed. The main interest of the painter was concentrated on the human bodies and their dramatic movements and intertwining. Most of the naked figures have a sculptural quality. The pallid skin colours of the doomed people make an effective contrast to the gloomy sea. It is this light-dark contrast which gives the painting its dramatic effect of agitation.



ROMANTICISM IN FRANCE 1815-1850

Rousing paintings of Neo-Baroque splendour

As in Germany, a phase of Restoration began in France in the wake of the wars of liberation. Napoleon's fame and grandeur were consigned to the past in 1815. The charismatic general had finally been stripped of power after the battle of Waterloo, and had been banished to St Helena as a prisoner of the English. Louis XVIII, a brother of the French king executed in the Revolution, returned to the throne. The republic once again became a monarchy. Many achievements were repealed, the old aristocracy had its former rights restored and Napoleon's supporters were persecuted.

Only now could Romanticism really take hold in the motherland of the French Revolution. Jacques Louis David and the Academy had until then been unchallenged authorities, and only the fall of Napoleon broke their hold. The young generation of artists fled the 'shopkeeper mentality' that now prevailed in the country, swapping them for glowingly painted wild adventures or remote, exotic climes.

A pioneer and, with Eugène Delacroix, the most important representative of Romantic painting in France, was Théodore Géricault: his dynamic *Raft of the Medusa* was the

scandal of the 1820 Salon. No-one until then had portrayed horror so directly and compellingly. The painting was all the more devastating in that the portrayed shipwreck was based on a real disaster. With the monumental representation, which makes the viewer a direct witness, a participant in the horror, Géricault primarily achieved an emotional effect. His powerful arrangement deliberately contradicted the calculated, intellectual painting of academic Neoclassicism. The stage-like stasis of the Neoclassical painters was alien to the impetuous Géricault. He was a painter of movement and emotion. He achieved the latter not just with the three-dimensionality of the figures and by working out the entire picture-space down to its last details, features which clearly reveal the influence of his model, Michelangelo, but also with the symbolic character of his raft of hopelessness. This symbolic potential of shipwreck and hope is just as typical Romanticism as the link between horrific reality and symbolic idealism, which gives the painting the same drama that characterised the works of the Baroque painters Rubens and Velázquez, models often copied by Géricault.

Delacroix, some years older than Géricault, continued the painter's artistic path after his early death. Impressed by his works, particularly by *The Raft of the Medusa*, Delacroix painted pictures whose brilliant *colour* and impetuous composition were designed to

Painter of light

CLAUDE MONET

1840-1926

Claude Monet helped Impressionism on the road to success as a European stylistic trend. Although he had nothing to do with the theoretical formulation of the artistic style, he was for a while its chief representative, but he survived the age of Impressionism by a generation, and also left behind a significant body of work in his old age.



Monet in his garden at Giverny around 1910

Claude Oscar Monet was born in Paris in 1840, the son of a businessman. The family soon moved to Le Havre, where the young Monet drew pictures and caricatures. In 1856 he went to study technical skills in the studio of Jacques François Ochard, where a year later he met the *plein-air* painter Eugène Boudin, who was to have a lasting

influence on him. In 1859 he made a study tour to Paris, received many impressions and attended the private Académie Suisse, where he met Camille Pissarro. He was unsatisfied with studio work, already feeling too dedicated to *plein-air* painting. Later he met Bazille, Renoir and Sisley, with whom he often painted in the forest at Chailly-en-Bière near Barbizon.

In 1870 Monet married his long-time lover Camille Doncieux, with whom he already had a son, and fled the Franco-Prussian War to London. There he saw landscapes by Consta-

ble and Turner, which made a deep impression on him with their free use of colour and the importance that they placed on the random, fleeting natural phenomena. Here he also made the acquaintance of the art dealer Durand-Ruel, who was later to buy many of his paintings and become one of his most important patrons, helping him with regular exhibitions.

The following year Monet painted in Holland and, after inheriting a modest fortune from his father, settled in Argenteuil, while Manet and Renoir soon came to work with him. In 1874, at his friends' first group exhibition, he showed his painting *Impression, Soleil levant – Impression, Sunrise*, which through its use in a satirical review by the critic Leroy, gave the movement its name.

Monet discovers light

With his first marine painting, Monet prepared the Impressionist style of painting: for him, sea and sky were no longer an effect-laden, homogeneous spatial stage which extended into the depth of the painting, according to the rules of perspective that had been known since the Renaissance. Rather he broke the space down into individual atmospheric phenomena, giving sky, sea and landscape an autonomous life of their own. Monet's specific coloration contributed to this autonomous life: he no longer geared the hue of the individual pic-



Rouen Cathedral: Early Morning, 1894. Oil on canvas, 100 x 66 cm. Museum Folkwang, Essen

ture-element towards the overall tone of the painting, but considered and treated each object as an autonomous part of the picture with a colour of its own. In fact, Monet had already laid such stress on all the light phenomena in nature that the material differentiation of the objects bathed in the light seems to be lost. Natural, external light itself becomes the object of representation, and begins to exclude the other picture elements. This often makes his paintings look like a breakdown of reality into coloured elements, behind which there is no longer any unified body; the picture as a whole becomes a confusion of colour-tones, and assumes an atomized appearance. The colours are light and bright and thus intensify the impression of the transparency of the picture elements.

The juxtaposition of many differently coloured tones, each with its autonomous value defined by the local light of the sun (*local colour*), means that the objects are not brought into depth, into the physical world, but broken down in the surface, in their juxtaposition.

Monet's multi-coloured landscape paintings never fall apart in compositional terms, because for all the freedom of their painterly transposition the artist always subjected them to the same organizational pattern: the light of the sun, which illuminates all the elements of the picture and connects them together like a net cast around them.

Monet at the peak of Impressionism

Despite his occasional successes, Monet's financial situation did not improve. But he did increasingly enter the public eye, and was also perceived as being at the vanguard and finally



La Gare St Lazare, 1877. Oil on canvas, 75 x 104 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Painter of passion and despair

VINCENT VAN GOGH

1853-1890

Vincent van Gogh, a loner and, to a large extent, an autodidact, was one of the most important predecessors of modern painting. He imbibed Impressionism, transformed it in his own way and became a major antecedent of the Expressionists. His wide-ranging, powerful work, but also his unhappy life, which was plagued by misfortune (in his whole life he did not sell a single painting), intense inner doubts and tremendous creative power, not to say obsession with work, have repeatedly made him the focus of attention of later generations.

Vincent van Gogh was born in 1853, the son of a Protestant minister in Groot-Zundert in northern Holland. After attending various boarding schools, in 1869 he went to work for his uncle, an art dealer in The Hague, and stayed there until 1876. Business trips during this period took him to London and Paris, amongst other places, and it was at this time that he began the correspondence with his brother Theo, four years younger than he was, which was to last throughout his life.

The quest for a vocation

After a short period of work as a teacher, he trained as a Methodist lay preacher, and began to study theology in Amsterdam, abandoning it shortly afterwards because of learning difficulties and the fear of failure. He also failed at the Mission School in Brussels, but at the end of 1878, at his own expense, he went as a voluntary missionary to the coal-mining district of the Borinage in Belgium.

Despite his strong social and religious commitment, he still found it impossible to make contact with the people there. At this point van Gogh began to overcome his inner tensions by drawing. At first he based his drawings on models by Jean-François Millet, whom he ad-

mired throughout his life, but then also made his own independent drawings and water-colours based on the miserable lives of the coal-miners.

In 1880 he took courses at the Art Academy in Brussels, but he basically remained an autodidact, and copied a series of social-romantic paintings. A brief return to his parents' house the following year ended with his unhappy love for a widowed cousin, and a temporary break with his family. At the end of 1881 Vincent went to study with his cousin, the painter Anton Mauve, in The Hague. Mauve advised him to work with oil paint.

Under the influence of the sociocritical novels of Flaubert and particularly of Zola, van Gogh decided to become a painter of simple people. He was particularly keen to turn his attention to the peasant life. After a short return to the provinces, whose loneliness he soon fled once more, he returned at the end of 1883 to his parents' house in Nuenen, where he stayed for two years. This stay was also overshadowed by an unhappy love.

Advocate of the simple life

During this period van Gogh turned to the tireless working method, driven by the fear of



Self Portrait with Bandaged Ear, 1889. Oil on canvas, 51 x 45 cm. Mr. and Mrs Leigh B. Block, Chicago

never being able to give his vision of contemporary painting its appropriate expression, which were to be characteristic of his work for the remaining years of his life. He produced some fifty paintings of people from his homeland, particularly peasants and weavers. Only seven lithographs remain of a planned cycle about peasant life.

In 1885, after many studies, he produced the painting *The Potato Eaters*. The community of these five people is based on their meagre potato dinner, and the fact of their sitting under the sparse light of their paraffin lamp; the colours are dark, the greyish brown tones refer to the earth. Van Gogh himself compared the tone of the painting with that of unpeeled, dusty potatoes.

At the same time the painting expresses strong social commitment and resignation. The forms appear oppressed, their faces are careworn to the point of caricature, their hands bony. The paintings from these years remain dark, their lines are heavy and simple, and they were described as 'tormented, dark Realism'.

Van Gogh in Paris

After a brief period at the Art Academy in Antwerp from autumn 1885, where he developed a particular enthusiasm for Rubens, but principally studied the technique of the Japanese woodcut, he turned up, surprisingly, in Paris, where his brother Theo ran an art gallery.

He came into contact with the group of the Impressionists, whose art at this point had, however, already passed its peak. Paris can be described as a crucial experience for van Gogh. He was enthusiastic about the luminescence of the Southern sun, and brightened his palette more and more. He learned to use purer colours in more intense contrasts, and tried for complementary colour chords of primary colours and mixed colours (red-green, blue-orange, yellow-violet).

In some of the 23 self-portraits he made during this period, and also in other paintings, he experimented with the prismatic splitting of the light, or homogeneous colour patches, into highly vibrant strokes in the manner of the Pointillistes.

The Potato Eaters, 1885. Oil on canvas, 82 x 114 cm. Vincent van Gogh Foundation/Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam



GLOSSARY

The terms explained are in *italics* in the main text

Abstract Expressionism: A blanket term for the various non-figurative trends in painting in the 1940s, 50s and 60s, in which expression and meaning are conveyed solely by colour, form and manner of painting.

Abstraction: Avoidance of any naturalistic depiction, to the point of complete renunciation of figurative representation.

Action Painting: A manner of painting in which, without a preliminary sketch, the paint is brushed, dripped or slung on to the canvas, which is sometimes lying on the floor. The pictorial structure is the result of an intuitively guided painting process, and of the different kinds of 'behaviour' of the paint, such as random dips.

Aerial perspective: A perspectival method which creates depth and space through the different spatial effects of cold and warm colours. In the background blue is stressed, and red and yellow in the foreground.

All-over painting: A painting style in which the canvas is covered with an unfocused structure of paint and form. The term is usually applied to Jackson Pollock's Action Paintings.

Alla prima (It. 'at first'): A method of painting in which the picture is painted without a sketch setting out the composition (underpainting), and carried out in a single layer of paint. The heyday of alla prima painting was Impressionism.

Allegory: Illustration of an abstract concept (freedom, justice, etc.), often in the form of a personification (e.g., Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People*, p. 61).

Analytic Cubism: See Cubism.

Anti-art: 'Non-artistic' form of expression deliberately rebelling against artistic tradition. Anti-art originated in Dadaism, and reappeared in the Happening and Fluxus movement of the Neo-Dadaists in the 1960s.

Antique, the: A term for Greek and Roman antiquity. Begins ca. 2000 BC, ends 500 AD. The Antique was particularly important as a source of inspiration for the artists of the Renaissance and Neoclassicism.

Arcadia: Greek landscape which, because of its purity and beauty, came to represent virtue, insouciance and happiness in literature and art. In the modern age, A. is linked with love poetry and pastoral poetry, and becomes the prototype of the classical ideal landscape, in which man and nature live in harmony.

Art nouveau: See Jugendstil.

L'art pour l'art (Fr. 'art for art's sake'): Art that is free of moral, political, philosophical or social claims, and made simply for its own sake.

Assemblage: A relief-like painting in which everyday objects are incorporated, generally unaltered, as part of the composition. The first assemblages were made by K. Schwitters in the 1910s.

Attribute: The sign (either an object or a particular action) used to characterise or identify a figure, e.g. a pot of salve and long hair for Mary Magdalen.

Automatism: A spontaneous technique of painting and writing: an artistic expression applied without rational control, moral or aesthetic considerations, used by the Surrealists and the artists of Abstract Expressionism.

Avant-garde: Artistic groups or artistic statements that are ahead of their time, point beyond what already exists and anticipate future trends.

Barbizon School: A group of French artists who devoted themselves to 'plein-air' painting after 1840, and are seen as having invented it.

Baroque (from 'Barocco', Port. 'irregular'): Stylistic epoch of European art between ca. 1600 and ca. 1750. Starting in Rome, the Baroque spread throughout Europe. Diverse in its different forms, according to national and religious allegiance. Characteristic: extreme dynamism, play with space and light situations.

Baroque Classicism: Trend within the art of the Baroque which, in contrast to the florid formal language of the Baroque, is influenced by the art of the Antique. One important representative of Baroque Classicism is N. Poussin.

Bauhaus: School of building and design founded in Germany in 1919, by the architect W. Gropius,

whose aim was to combine the arts and crafts.

Biedermeier: German stylistic trend between 1815 and 1848. Characteristic motifs are bourgeois idylls. Most important representative: C. Spitzweg.

Blauer Reiter, Der (Ger. 'The Blue Rider'): Title of an almanac containing art-theoretical essays, published by W. Kandinsky and F. Marc in 1910. Later also the name of an artists' association based around these two artists, which turned against academic painting and Impressionism under the influence of Cubism and orphism, and attempted to express 'the spiritual in art' in an abstract-tending pictorial language.

Brücke, Die (Ger. 'The Bridge'): Expressionist artists' community (190-1913). The work of the 'Brücke' artists feature intense colours, and a flat style with heavy outlines and a woodcut-like coarseness.

Brushwork: The qualities of a personal handwriting, for example in an artist's application of paint (brushstroke, mode of application, line).

Camera obscura (Lat. 'dark room'): A pinhole camera which was used from the 17th century as an aid to studies of perspectival constructions, portraits and proportions.

Caravaggisti: Artist's influenced by Caravaggio's painting, who took up his spotlight-like chiaroscuro lighting and the realistic treatment of classical subjects.

Chiaroscuro (It. 'light-dark'): Technique used since the 16th century, in which colour is less important than a strong contrast of light and dark.

Cinquecento: Italian term for the 16th century (It. 'five hundred', hence '1500').

Classical Modernism: Art-historical term to describe the beginnings of abstract art, beginning with Cézanne.

Cloisonnism, cloisonnisme: A style recalling the lead boundaries used to isolate areas of colour in stained-glass windows, developed at the end of the 19th century by E. Bernard and P. Gauguin.

Colour-Field Painting: Trend in Abstract Expressionism chiefly in the 1960s, in which a colour, the sole expressive medium, is applied in such a way as to cover a whole surface of the canvas. Important representatives include B.

Newman and M. Rothko.

Complementary colours: The colours on the colour circle or colour triangle which produce white if mixed additively, and black if mixed subtractively: red-green, blue-orange, yellow-violet.

Complementary contrast: Colour contrast in which complementary colours are played off against one another. With complementary contrast, the effects of the colours are intensified.

Composition: Formal structure on the basis of particular ordering principles. Principles of composition can be: relation of colour and form, symmetry/ asymmetry, movement, rhythm, etc.

Conceptual Art: International art movement which, from the 1970s onwards, declared the intellectual process, free from the necessity of transposition into images, to be an art work.

Constructivism: Movement within abstract art from the beginning of the 20th century, which, free of any figuration, attempts to create harmonic structures with abstract geometrical forms.

Contour: The outline of a form, painted as a line or evoked through contrast.

Contrapposto (It. 'placed opposite'): Way of representing standing full-length figures in equilibrium, with a 'free-leg' and a 'standing leg'. Was developed in classical Greek sculpture and rediscovered in the Renaissance. (Cf. Botticelli, *Birth of Venus* (p.13) or Michelangelo, *David* (p.16).)

Contrast: In painting, the distinction is made between 'light and dark contrasts', 'colour contrasts', 'warm and cold contrasts', 'complementary contrasts' and 'simultaneous contrasts'.

Copper engraving: The earliest type of gravure. The drawing is engraved on a copper plate, paint is rubbed into the scratches and transferred to paper under mechanical pressure.

Craft: Unlike the liberal arts, crafts are the applied arts, including textile, glass, ceramics, enamel and furniture.

Critical Realism: German art movement in the 1960s which showed contemporary themes painted in a realistic manner, or captured social relations in provocative, satirical distortions.

Cubism: Movement formed by P. Picasso and G. Braque (around 1907), in which objects are no longer reproduced according to

their visual impression; everything figurative is broken down into geometrical shapes. A distinction is made between 'analytic Cubism' (until ca. 1911) and 'synthetic Cubism' (1912 until mid 1920s)

Cubo-Futurism: Russian artistic movement in the early years of the 20th century, in which Cubist and Futurist influences were combined.

Dadaism: Art movement begun during the First World War, which rebelled against traditional art values with deliberate nonsense and new expressive forms, called 'anti-art', such as photomontage, sound poems, etc.

Danube School: A loose group of artists in the German territories along the Danube at the beginning of the 16th century. The painters of this school developed a new form of landscape painting, in which the experience of nature is highly important, and the landscape is painted for its own sake, no longer as a prop and a backdrop.

De Stijl: Dutch artists' group set up in 1917 by P. Mondrian and Th. van Doesburg, whose abstract paintings, constructed from geometrical surfaces in pure colours, represent a variation of Constructivism.

Decalcomanie: Method developed by the Surrealist M. Ernst. In Decalcomanie, damp paint is transferred from one support (paper, glass) to paper by being rubbed by hand.

Devotional painting: Paintings designed for quiet contemplation and personal devotion. The preferred motifs since the 14th century have been the Passion of Christ and Maria, the Last Supper, and the Mourning of Christ.

Drip Painting: A painting technique in which the paint is dripped in uncontrolled gestures on a canvas laid out on the floor. The term is usually applied to the painting of J. Pollock.

Divisionism: A method of dissecting colour and light, used in late Impressionism, in which points of colour on the canvas assemble into colour chords and shapes in the eye.

Écriture automatique (Fr. 'automatic writing'): A creative process based on Freudian psychoanalysis, based on an unreflective, trance-like manner of painting, drawing or writing. By eliminating rational control and aesthetic norms, the unconscious is sup-

posed to rise to the surface. Used principally by the Surrealists.

Emblem: A pictorial and literary art form, in which what is represented (the emblem) is turned into a universal symbol by a motto or a brief inscription. In the Baroque, many 'emblem books' were used to decode this mode of representation used in religious or moral teaching.

Environment: Artistic form of the second half of the 20th century, in which spaces are shaped artistically and thus become works which the viewer can enter.

Etching: Gravure technique, like the principle of the copper engraving, but easier to produce as the plates are generally made of softer metals.

Expressionism: Artistic movement in the first half of the 20th century, stressing subjective experience. Expressionism is characterised by a highly expressive, non-realistic colour and form, and a flat application of paint deliberately ignoring three-dimensionality.

Fantastic Realism: Art movement of the early 60s, typified by a rather Mannerist, superficially aestheticizing, visionary style.

Fauvism, Fauves (Fr. 'wild beasts'): A loose association of French artists formed around H. Matisse in 1905, which opposed the Impressionist breakdown of colour with pure, unbroken colour, from which it constructed its paintings, ignoring representational precision.

Figuration, figurative painting: Representational painting.

Fontainebleau School: Group of mostly Italian artists who were commissioned to decorate the Chateau of Fontainebleau near Paris. They developed a decorative, ornamental style derivative of Mannerism.

Fresco (It. 'fresh'): Wall painting, in which paint is applied to wet plaster, and blends with it as it dries.

Frottage (Fr. 'rubbing'): Technique in which the structures of materials (e.g. wood) are made visible on paper through rubbing. Developed by M. Earnst in 1925.

Futurism: Italian art movement founded by the writer F.T. Marinetti, with the publication of the *Futurist Manifesto*. The attitude of the group was anti-academic, their art was based on modern technology and the intoxication of speed.

Genre painting: Art showing scenes from daily life. In the academic hierarchy it was seen as a 'low genre', and is marked by its high degree of lifelike realism. Divided into the categories of peasant, bourgeois and court genre painting, it enjoyed its peak in Holland in the 17th century.

Geometrical Abstraction: A reduction of the pictorial composition to clear geometrical forms. The surface is given a rhythm through colour. Based on Constructivism, its peak was in the 1950s and 60s.

Gestural painting: In Modernism, a style in which the process of the creation of the work is recorded in the marks on the canvas.

Glaze: Thin, transparent application of paint on dried layers of paint or on a ground, not in order to hide it but to provide finely-graded shades and mixtures of colour.

Golden section: A proportion in which a line is divided into two so that the smaller part is to the larger as the larger is to the whole. This proportion is held to be particularly harmonic. It was known in classical antiquity, and rediscovered by the Renaissance.

Gothic: In general terms, the art of the Middle Ages, which developed over various periods in all the arts in Europe. Starting with the architecture of the 12th century, Gothic was almost entirely dominated by religious tasks. In Italy, Giotto set new standards in the transition between Gothic and the Early Renaissance.

Gouache: A painting technique using water-based colours, which are opaque when dry. The addition of binders and filler produce a pastel-like effect and a brittle surface.

Graphic art: Blanket term for drawings and print-based works (e.g., etching, woodcut, engraving, etc.) on paper.

Grattage (Fr. 'scraping'): A method developed from the frottage technique. A surface prepared with a thick layer of paint is scratched and scraped to produce changes in the layers of paint, and effects of light and shade.

Happening: An art form chiefly from the 1960s, in which the artwork is an action. This action, often lifelike or close to the everyday, aims at the involvement of the viewer. It is improvised, provocative, unpredictable and impossible to reproduce.

Hard-edge: Abstract trend of the 1960s and 70s, featuring cleanly defined, often geometrical areas of colour. Part of 'colour field' painting.

Heroic landscape: See Landscape.

History painting: The illustration of historical events, mythological, Biblical and literary themes which are either realistic or idealised. Until the end of the 19th century the highest form of art in painting followed by the portrait and the 'low genres' of landscape, genre and still life.

Historicism: A revival of earlier artistic styles, to make a new style, e.g., Neoclassicism.

Hyperrealism: Art movement comparable to photorealism and its aims, based on the principle of the illusion of reality and the reality of illusion.

Icon: Originally a panel painting of the Greek Orthodox Church, formed for centuries according to rigid patterns and strict traditions. In the extended sense: 'typical or classic example'.

Iconography: Meaning of the form and content of picture-signs. Also a term for the academic discipline devoted to the investigation of picture-content.

Ideal landscape: See Landscape.

Idealism: Philosophy and artistic mode in which reality is not shown as it is, but in the spirit of a particular idea. Idealistic tendencies are to be found in the painting of the second half of the 19th century (e.g., A. Böcklin), but also in the idealising vision of 'Socialist Realism'.

Illusionism: Painting which, with perspective and painterly devices, generates the optical appearance of three-dimensionality and spatiality.

Impasto: Application of paint (with spatula or large brush) in which the paint creates a three-dimensional effect in the paint itself.

Impressionism: An art movement formed around 1870 in France, concerned with capturing the object in its momentary dependency on lighting. Marked by a blurred style, bright coloration and often arbitrary-looking framing; favourite motifs of I. were landscapes and scenes of urban life.

Informel: Non-figurative painting of the second half of the 20th century.



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